



Brian B. Cahill

Majority Leader

Robert S. Parete, Majority Whip

Ulster County Legislature

Majority Platform Address

February 19, 2008

David B. Donaldson, Chairman

Gary Bischoff
Thomas J. (TJ) Briggs
Frank Dart
Jon Decker
Donald Gregorius
Peter Kraft
Alan Lomita
Peter Loughran

Richard A. Parete
Jeanette Provenzano
Hector Rodriguez
Brian Shapiro
Mary Sheeley
Joseph Stoeckeler
Philip Terpening
Susan Zimet

Chairman Donaldson, Majority Whip Parete, Minority Leader Noonan, Fellow Legislators, Legislative Clerk Mihm, the citizens of Ulster County who are in attendance, and members of the press, good evening. It is a privilege and honor to stand before you as the Majority Leader in this, the final year under our current form of Government.

I will keep my comments brief and to the point.

I can think of no better way to start than, on behalf of my fellow Democrats, to publicly thank each and every County employee who believes in the Majority's agenda of change and growth. These hard working and dedicated public servants deserve our thanks and recognition. With your support and dedication, you make it possible for us to continue to advance "The People's Agenda".

Over the past 2 years, we moved this county forward under the leadership and direction of our Chairman, David Donaldson, our former leader -- my friend, Jeanette Provenzano and Majority Whip Robert Parete. With their guidance and through the cooperation and significant effort of individual Legislators, the Democratic Majority has made tremendous strides in reshaping and improving Ulster County government. As we move ahead, we must continue on with this agenda -- the Democratic Majority agenda -- that has brought about many positive changes.

We have already streamlined and consolidated the Department of Public Works. Our Probation Department now includes the Alternative Sentencing and Community Corrections Departments. We have a contract manager review process for all county contracts and licensee agreements. We have installed sorely needed checks and balances in book keeping and auditing. Criminal background checks for new employees are now a standard. We created a Department of the Environment and established a Global Warming Advisory Committee.

These are just some of the changes the Democratic Majority has made.

And, along with other fundamental reforms, they did not happen by accident. When dedicated, hard working Legislators and employees were given an opportunity to fix a government that had been underperforming for a very long time, they rose to the challenge.

In the elections of 2005 and again in 2007, the voters of Ulster County gave us, the Democratic Majority, a mandate to improve county government. Over the past two years we took that commitment seriously and we delivered. We will continue to do so this year and well into the future by addressing the structural deficiencies of this vast organization, some of which have existed for decades. We reversed the trend of ever-escalating, double digit tax increases. For our first two years of governance we returned reasonable budgets and will, once again this year, direct the County Administrator to assemble a budget that is fair, accurate and consistent with the Democratic Majority goal of property tax relief for all Ulster County taxpayers.

This year, as we embark on an important journey in Ulster County history, we are poised to add to the people's mandate. It is indeed an exciting time to be a part of the Ulster County Legislature. I stand here tonight and invite our colleagues from the Republican side of the aisle to join us in making this session of the legislature truly historic -- in a way the people of Ulster County will proudly remember this chapter of our progress.

We face the daunting task of preparing for a new form of government in Ulster County, at the end of this year, we will no longer be the custodians of the day-to-day operations of the County. We turn that task over to a newly elected County Executive.

That simple concept alone represents a tremendous amount of forethought and work on our part. As we approach the hand off, we must remain focused on our primary responsibilities:

- To ensure that necessary services and programs are delivered by Ulster County at a reasonable cost
- To provide for the health, safety and well-being of our residents.
- To protect the lands we were entrusted with by our forebearers and that we must leave to our children and their children.
- To create opportunity, and to get out of the way when opportunity is created by others

This will require vigilance by each of us. We must avoid being distracted by the urgency that we will face as the year progresses towards the changeover. The tasks involved in preparing for the County Executive, are above and beyond our normal scope of work. But we cannot lose sight of our core mission. We must stay focused.

One area where each and every legislator must do a better job is with economic development. Like me, I am sure you are tired of reading of, and hearing of success stories from Dutchess, Orange and now Greene Counties. It is our turn to enjoy some of that success. We need to become partners with the business community to help grow current enterprises and to attract new opportunities to Ulster County. We have to build on the steps we have already taken to make UCDC grants and loans more accountable and results-driven and where we have shown that we support incubating new business by investing in the Hudson Valley Center for Innovation.

These examples of the Legislature's commitment to being partners with our business community are just the beginning. Each of us need to prove that we are active partners and not just passive spectators.

The recent solar energy initiatives in Ulster County are examples of the kind of development that can have lucrative economic benefits now and a positive environmental impact for generations to come. My colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans, we can not let this opportunity slip away.

As most of you are aware, the issues facing us are many. We have challenges in each segment of our government, -- but -- I promised to keep it short. Here are some things I will ask each of you to address in the coming year.

We have the problem of our ever increasing need for space including Family Court, Information Services and the incoming County Executive and Comptroller.

We need to talk about, focus on, and prepare for the impending explosive growth of our Senior population that will now includes baby boomers.

And in these uncertain economic times, we cannot ignore that there is a potetnial for an increase in applicants for public assistance.

Then there is a subject near and dear to me personally. We must continue our mission to bring the Ulster County government into the 21st Century by utilizing the Internet and enhancing technology to provide residents and visitors with access to information and services -- 24/7, 365 days a year.

Mr Chairman, colleagues, I would like to highlight one area that I am sure is of deep concern to all of us. Each day we welcome home an ever increasing number of Iraqi and Afghanistan War Veterans. These brave men and women will need as much attention, if not more than the Veterans of other wars. We must be prepared to fulfill our obligation to provide the services that these Americans have most assuredly deserve. They have sacrificed for all of us, we must ensure that we do all we can to help these veterans transition back into their day to day lives as part of our community.

One final thought -- -- -- If I sound like I am proud of the majority, it is because I am. I am honored to be a member of this Legislature. We

should proud of all that has been accomplished. We should be excited about the great promise for Ulster County's future.

Thank you.